

What is claimed is:

- 1 1. A method for identifying potential buyers, comprising the steps of:
  - 2 receiving intent data from a potential buyer, wherein the intent data identifies an
  - 3 item the potential buyer intends to purchase within a particular time period; and
  - 4 determining a reward for the potential buyer based on the intent data.
- 1 2. The method of claim 1, further comprising the step of:
  - 2 receiving a payment identifier of a financial account of the potential buyer.
- 1 3. The method of claim 1, further comprising the step of:
  - 2 receiving a payment identifier that identifies an electronic currency.
- 1 4. The method of claim 2, further comprising the steps of:
  - 2 issuing the reward to the potential buyer; and
  - 3 applying a penalty to the financial account of the potential buyer if the potential
  - 4 buyer does not purchase the item within the particular time period.
- 1 5. The method of claim 4, further comprising the step of:
  - 2 calculating the penalty, wherein the calculation takes into account a value of the
  - 3 reward.
- 1 6. The method of claim 4, wherein the step of applying the penalty comprises the  
2 steps of:
  - 3 receiving a confirmation that the potential buyer has purchased within the
  - 4 particular time period a similar item to the item the potential buyer intended to purchase;
  - 5 and
  - 6 applying a partial penalty to the financial account of the potential buyer, wherein
  - 7 the partial penalty is less than a total penalty charged when the potential buyer fails to
  - 8 purchase the item within the particular time period.

1      7.      The method of claim 4, wherein the step of applying the penalty to the potential  
2      buyer comprises the steps of:

3                receiving a confirmation that the potential buyer has purchased within the  
4      particular time period a similar item to the item the potential buyer intended to purchase;  
5      and

6                applying a partial penalty to the financial account.

1      8.      The method of claim 1, wherein the intent data received from the potential buyer  
2      includes a degree of certainty with which the potential buyer intends to purchase the item  
3      within the particular time period.

1      9.      The method of claim 1, further comprising the step of:  
2                receiving a confirmation when the potential buyer has purchased the item within  
3      the particular time period.

1      10.     The method of claim 1, wherein the particular time period is specified by at least  
2      one of the potential buyer and a central server.

1      11.     A method for identifying potential buyers, comprising the steps of:  
2                receiving a description of an item a potential buyer intends to purchase within a  
3      particular time period, the description having a degree of specificity;  
4                receiving a degree of certainty with which the potential buyer intends to purchase  
5      the item within the particular time period;  
6                receiving a payment identifier of a financial account of the potential buyer;  
7                determining a reward offer associated with a reward based on at least one of the  
8      degree of specificity, the degree of certainty, and a length of the particular time period;  
9      and  
10                outputting the reward offer to the potential buyer.

1      12.     The method of claim 11, further comprising the step of:

2 receiving a confirmation signal indicating that the potential buyer purchased the  
3 item within the particular time period.

1 13. The method of claim 12, further comprising the steps of:  
2 determining whether the confirmation signal indicating that the potential buyer  
3 has purchased the item within the particular time period has been received; and  
4 applying a penalty to the financial account of the potential buyer when the  
5 potential buyer has not purchased the item within the particular time period.

1 14. The method of claim 13, further comprising the step of:  
2 calculating the penalty, wherein the calculation takes into account a price of a  
3 reward associated with the reward offer.

1 15. The method of claim 11, wherein the degree of certainty is monotonically related  
2 to a value of the reward offer, such that a greater degree of certainty corresponds to a  
3 greater valued reward offer and a lower degree of certainty corresponds to a lower valued  
4 reward offer.

1 16. The method of claim 11, wherein the degree of specificity is monotonically  
2 related to a value of the reward offer, such that a greater degree of specificity corresponds  
3 to a greater valued reward offer and a lower degree of specificity corresponds to a lower  
4 valued reward offer.

1 17. The method of claim 11, wherein the particular time period is monotonically  
2 related to a value of the reward offer, such that a smaller time period corresponds to a  
3 greater valued reward offer and a greater time period corresponds to a lower valued  
4 reward offer.

1 18. The method of claim 11, further comprising the steps of:  
2 determining whether the potential buyer accepts the reward offer; and

3 issuing the reward to the potential buyer if the potential buyer accepts the reward  
4 offer.

1 19. The method of claim 11, further comprising the steps of:  
2 receiving a confirmation signal indicating that the potential buyer purchased the  
3 item after the particular time period; and  
4 applying a partial penalty to the financial account of the potential buyer.

1 20. The method of claim 11, further comprising the steps of:  
2 receiving a confirmation signal indicating that the potential buyer purchased  
3 within the particular time period a similar item to the item the potential buyer intended to  
4 purchase; and  
5 applying a partial penalty to the financial account of the potential buyer.

1 21. The method of claim 11, further comprising the steps of:  
2 receiving a confirmation signal after the particular time period indicating that the  
3 potential buyer purchased the item within the particular time period; and  
4 applying a partial penalty to the financial account of the potential buyer.

1 22. The method of claim 11, further comprising the steps of:  
2 receiving a confirmation signal indicating that the potential buyer purchased  
3 within the particular time period a similar item to the item the potential buyer intended to  
4 purchase; and  
5 updating a database to indicate that no penalty has been applied to the financial  
6 account of the potential buyer.

1 23. A method for applying a penalty, comprising the steps of:  
2 determining whether a potential buyer has fulfilled an obligation to purchase an  
3 item within a particular time period;  
4 retrieving an applicable penalty from a penalty database; and

5 applying the applicable penalty to a financial account of the potential buyer.

1 24. A method for applying a penalty, comprising the steps of:  
2 determining whether a potential buyer has fulfilled an obligation to purchase an  
3 item within a particular time period;  
4 calculating a penalty, wherein the calculation takes into account a price of a  
5 reward offered to the potential buyer in exchange for the obligation to purchase the item  
6 within the particular time period; and  
7 applying the penalty to a financial account of the potential buyer.

1 25. A method for applying a penalty, comprising the steps of:  
2 (a) determining whether a particular time period in which a potential buyer  
3 intends to purchase an item has expired;  
4 (b) repeating step (a) until the particular time period has expired;  
5 (c) calculating a penalty; and  
6 (d) applying the penalty to a financial account of the potential buyer.

1 26. The method of claim 25, further comprising the steps of:  
2 (e) receiving a confirmation signal indicating the potential buyer has  
3 purchased the item after the particular time period has expired; and  
4 (f) refunding a portion of the penalty to the financial account.

1 27. A method for identifying potential buyers, comprising the steps of:  
2 receiving intent data from a potential buyer;  
3 generating a reward offer associated with a reward for the potential buyer based  
4 upon the intent data; and  
5 issuing the reward to the potential buyer.

1 28. The method of claim 27, wherein the intent data includes at least a description of  
2 an item the potential buyer intends to purchase within a particular time period.

1    29.    The method of claim 27, wherein the reward is issued to the potential buyer  
2    within a particular time period but before the potential buyer purchases the item.

1    30.    A method for identifying potential buyers, comprising the steps of:  
2         (a) receiving intent data from a potential buyer intending to purchase an item  
3    within a particular time period;  
4         (b) associating a financial account with the potential buyer;  
5         (c) determining a reward offer associated with a reward based on a value of the  
6    intent data;  
7         (d) outputting the reward offer to the potential buyer;  
8         (e) determining whether the potential buyer accepts the offer;  
9         (f) modifying the offer if the potential buyer rejects the offer;  
10      (g) repeating steps (d) through (f) until the potential buyer accepts the offer;  
11      (h) issuing the reward to the potential buyer; and  
12      (i) receiving a confirmation signal indicating that the potential buyer has  
13    purchased the item corresponding to the intent data.

1    31.    The method of claim 30, wherein the intent data includes one or more of a  
2    potential buyer identifier, a description of the item and a degree of certainty with which  
3    the potential buyer intends to purchase the item within the particular time period.

1    32.    The method of claim 30, wherein the value of the intent data is based in part on  
2    one or more of a degree of specificity of a description of the item, a degree of certainty  
3    with which the potential buyer intends to purchase the item within the particular time  
4    period, a length of the particular time period, and a reputation rating of the potential  
5    buyer.

1    33.    The method of claim 30, wherein value of the intent data is based in part on the  
2    reputation of the potential buyer, determined by at least one of:  
3         a frequency with which the potential buyer has previously provided intent data;

4           a frequency with which the potential buyer has previously purchased items within  
5 particular time periods;

6           a frequency with which the potential buyer has previously confirmed purchases  
7 within particular time periods;

8           a frequency with which the potential buyer has previously incurred penalties,

9           types of items previously purchased by the potential buyer;

10          cost of items previously purchased by the potential buyer;

11          a status of the financial account of the potential buyer; and

12          a value of demographic information associated with the potential buyer.

1   34. The method of claim 33, wherein demographic information includes at least one of  
2 address, income and age.

1   35. The method of claim 30, further comprising the step of:  
2       determining whether the confirmation signal is valid; and  
3       applying a penalty to the financial account if the confirmation signal is invalid.

1   36. The method of claim 35, wherein the step of determining whether the  
2 confirmation signal is valid includes one or more of the steps of:  
3       verifying a potential buyer identifier;  
4       determining whether the confirmation signal was received within the particular  
5 time period; and  
6       determining whether the new item purchased by the potential buyer is related to  
7 the item the potential buyer intended to purchase within the particular time period.

1   37. The method of claim 35, wherein the penalty is calculated based on a value of the  
2 reward.

1   38. The method of claim 30, further comprising the step of updating a database to  
2 reflect that the confirmation signal has been received.

1       39.     The method of claim 30, wherein the reward is issued to the potential buyer by  
2     shipping the reward to an address specified by the potential buyer.

1       40.     A method of storing information reflecting that a confirmation signal has been  
2     received from a potential buyer, comprising the steps of:  
3              receiving an identifier of the potential buyer intending to purchase an item within  
4     a particular time period;  
5              receiving the confirmation signal from the potential buyer indicating the potential  
6     buyer has purchased the item;  
7              validating the confirmation signal; and  
8              updating a database to reflect that the confirmation signal has been received.

1       41.     The method of claim 40, wherein the step of validating the confirmation signal  
2     includes at least one of:  
3              verifying the potential buyer identifier;  
4              determining whether the confirmation signal was received within the particular  
5     time period; and  
6              determining whether the item purchased by the potential buyer is the same as the  
7     item the potential buyer intended to purchase within the particular time period.

1       42.     A method for rewarding a potential buyer, comprising the steps of:  
2              offering a reward to a potential buyer for inputting a description of an item the  
3     potential buyer intends to purchase within a particular time period; and  
4              issuing the reward after the description is input.

1       43.     An apparatus for identifying potential buyers, comprising:  
2              a central server coupled to one or more input devices for receiving intent data  
3     from a potential buyer, wherein the intent data includes a description of an item the  
4     potential buyer intends to purchase within a particular time period,

5                   the central server operable to determine a reward for the potential buyer based on  
6                   the intent data.

1       44.     The apparatus of claim 43, further comprising a database coupled to the central  
2                   server for storing the description of the item the potential buyer intends to purchase and  
3                   related information.

1       45.     The apparatus of claim 44, wherein the related information includes at least one  
2                   of:

3                   a degree of certainty with which the potential buyer intends to purchase the item  
4                   within the particular time period;  
5                   a degree of specificity with which the item is described;  
6                   a length of the particular time period;  
7                   a payment identifier;  
8                   a reputation of the potential buyer; and  
9                   demographic information associated with the potential buyer.

1       46.     The apparatus of claim 44, wherein the related information is based in part on the  
2                   reputation of the potential buyer, determined by at least one of:

3                   a frequency with which the potential buyer has previously provided intent data;  
4                   a frequency with which the potential buyer has previously purchased items within  
5                   particular time periods;  
6                   a frequency with which the central server has received confirmation signals  
7                   associated with a potential buyer;  
8                   a frequency with which the potential buyer has previously incurred penalties;  
9                   types of items previously purchased by the potential buyer;  
10                  costs of items previously purchased by the potential buyer;  
11                  a status of the financial account of the potential buyer; and  
12                  a value of demographic information of the potential buyer

1    47. The method of claim 44, wherein the related information includes at least one of  
2    address, income and age.

1    48. The apparatus of claim 43, further comprising a database coupled to the central  
2    server for storing intent data used to calculate the reward to issue to the potential buyer.

1    49. The apparatus of claim 48, wherein the reward is determined based in part on a  
2    rating assigned to each of a plurality of intent data, the intent data including at least one  
3    of:

4              a degree of certainty with which the potential buyer intends to purchase the item  
5    within the particular time period;  
6              a degree of specificity with which the item is described;  
7              a length of the particular time period;  
8              a payment identifier; and  
9              demographic information.

1    50. The apparatus of claim 49, wherein a sum of the ratings corresponds to the reward  
2    for which the potential buyer qualifies.

1    51. The apparatus of claim 43 further comprising a database coupled to the central  
2    server for storing a plurality of rewards.

1    52. The apparatus of claim 43, further comprising a database coupled to the central  
2    server for storing a potential buyer identifier and related information.

1    53. The apparatus of claim 52, wherein the related information comprises one or more  
2    of a payment identifier and a potential buyer name.

1    54. The apparatus of claim 43, further comprising a database coupled to the central  
2    server for storing a potential buyer identifier and penalty information.

1       55.     The apparatus of claim 54, wherein the penalty information includes one or more  
2     of a reward identifier, an expiration of the particular time period, whether a confirmation  
3     signal has been received indicating that the potential buyer has purchased the item, and a  
4     penalty assessment corresponding to a value of the reward.

1       56.     The apparatus of claim 54, wherein the penalty information includes an expiration  
2     of the particular time period and a penalty assessment corresponding to a value of the  
3     reward.

1       57.     A central server system, comprising:  
2              a processor;  
3              a storage device coupled to the processor; and  
4              software operative to run on the processor to issue a reward to a potential buyer in  
5     exchange for demand information, the demand information including at least a  
6     description of an item the potential buyer intends to purchase within a particular time  
7     period.

1       58.     The system of claim 57, wherein the demand information includes at least one of:  
2              a potential buyer name;  
3              a degree of certainty with which the potential buyer intends to purchase the item  
4     within the particular time period;  
5              a degree of specificity with which the item is described;  
6              a length of the particular time period;  
7              a payment identifier, a reputation of the potential buyer; and  
8              demographic information associated with the buyer.

1       59.     The system of claim 57, wherein the storage device includes a database for storing  
2     the demand information and related information.

1       60.     The system of claim 59, wherein the related information includes a corresponding  
2     rating for each type of demand information.

1       61.     The system of claim 57, further comprising a database coupled to the processor  
2     for storing a reward identifier and related information.

1       62.     The system of claim 61, wherein the related information includes a total rating  
2     corresponding to the demand information and the reward identifier, and a reward  
3     description corresponding to the reward identifier.

1       63.     The system of claim 57, further comprising a database coupled to the processor  
2     for storing penalty information and related information.

1       64.     The system of claim 63, wherein the related information includes at least one of:  
2              a payment identifier of the potential buyer;  
3              an expiration time of the particular time period; and  
4              a corresponding penalty.

1       65.     The system of claim 64, wherein the software is operable to direct the processor to  
2     charge the corresponding penalty to a financial account associated with the payment  
3     identifier of the potential buyer if the potential buyer does not purchase the item by the  
4     expiration time.

1       66.     The system of claim 64, wherein the software is operable to direct the processor to  
2     charge the corresponding penalty to a financial account associated with the payment  
3     identifier of the potential buyer if a confirmation signal is not received by the expiration  
4     time.

1    67.    The system of claim 57, further comprising one or more potential buyer devices  
2    coupled to the processor and operable to allow potential buyers to input demand  
3    information.

1    68.    The system of claim 67, wherein the potential buyer devices are operable to  
2    display information about the reward.

1    69.    The system of claim 57, further comprising an output device for displaying  
2    information about the reward.

1    70.    The system of claim 57, wherein the processor is coupled to a clock, a  
2    communications port, an input device and an output device, and wherein the storage  
3    device contains a demand information database, a reward database, and a penalty  
4    database.

1    71.    The system of claim 57, wherein the software is operable to direct the processor to  
2    charge a penalty to a financial account of the potential buyer if a confirmation signal is  
3    not received within the particular time period.

1    72.    The system of claim 57, wherein the software is operable to direct the processor to  
2    charge a penalty to a financial account of the potential buyer if the potential buyer does  
3    not purchase the item within the particular time period.

1    73.    The system of claim 57, further comprising one or more seller devices coupled to  
2    the controller and operable to allow sellers to retrieve demand information.

1    74.    A computer readable medium for directing a processor to perform the method of  
2    claim 1.

1    75. An information transmission medium for use in a potential buyer identification  
2    system, the information transmission medium transmitting a computer program  
3    comprising the processing steps of:

4         receiving intent data from a potential buyer, wherein the intent data includes at  
5         least a description of an item the potential buyer intends to purchase within a particular  
6         time period; and

7         determining a reward for the potential buyer based upon the intent data.

1    76. A computer data signal representative of controller instructions comprising the  
2    processing steps of:

3         receiving intent data from a potential buyer, wherein the intent data includes at  
4         least a description of an item the potential buyer intends to purchase within a particular  
5         time period; and

6         determining a reward for the potential buyer based upon the intent data.